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General debate on national experience in population matters: fertility, reproductive health and development

Statement submitted by Population Action International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

Ensuring Reproductive Rights Is Essential to Development

Reproductive Rights Are Key to Development

1. The Programme of Action for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) affirms the "basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health." All people have a right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence.[1] Access to modern family planning and contraceptive services — a fundamental part of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) — improves women's health and well-being.[2]

2. Beyond benefiting individuals and couples, lower fertility rates made possible by the provision of a full range of voluntary reproductive health services and supplies contribute to the attainment of a broader set of development objectives and are critical for meeting the Millennium Development Goals. For example, schoolgirls who become pregnant are often forced to drop out of school temporarily, and face barriers to re-entry.[3] Women who have at least finished primary education have more control over the decisions that affect their lives, including in matters related to their sexual and reproductive health.[4] Family planning can also ease pressure on natural resources. And slower population growth helps people adapt to climate change, reduces the scale of human vulnerability to climate impacts, and gives governments more opportunity to make important investments in health care and education.[5]

Robust Investment, Better Integration, and Attention to Vulnerable Groups Needed

3. Despite the importance of SRHR, an estimated 215 million women who want to avoid pregnancy are not using modern contraception.[6] In order to achieve universal access to reproductive health and the full realization of reproductive rights in resource-poor settings, donors and host country governments must increase and improve financial investment and take a more integrated, inclusive approach to

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* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.

[1] UNFPA. 2004. Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. New York: UNFPA.

[2] Singh et al. 2009. Adding It Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Family Planning and Maternal and Newborn Health." New York: Guttmacher Institute and UNFPA.

[3] UN Millennium Project. 2006. Public Choices, Private Decisions: Sexual and Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

[4] Family Care International. 2005. Millennium Development Goals & Sexual and Reproductive Health. New York: FCI.

[5] PAI and the Population Justice Project. 2010. *Population and the Environment: Where We're Headed and What We Can Do*. Issue & Policy Brief. Washington DC: PAI.

[6] Singh, S, J Darroch, L Ashford and M Vlassoff. 2009. Adding It Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing In Family Planning and Maternal and Newborn Health. New York, Guttmacher Institute and UNFPA.

address the needs of marginalized groups, including women, youth and people living with HIV.

4. The lack of adequate funding remains a significant constraint to the full implementation of the Programme of Action of the ICPD, and to the realization of reproductive rights. We encourage developed and developing country governments to honor commitments and make every effort to mobilize the required resources to ensure that the health, development and human rights-related objectives of the Programme of Action are met, and pay special attention to achieving universal access to modern methods of family planning.

5. In line with efforts to improve the effectiveness of aid, the international community must make international cooperation and assistance more predictable and better aligned with national priorities, and channel assistance to recipient countries in ways that strengthen national health systems. To enhance transparency and foster greater accountability, governments should devote specific budget lines to family planning interventions including contraceptive supplies.

6. To maximize the development impact of funding, priority needs to be given to evidence-based policies and programmes that integrate sexual and reproductive health, HIV, and maternal, newborn and child health and strengthen primary care services. Donors and host governments must ensure that investments address gender equality and women's empowerment as a critical factor for the attainment of sustainable development, the elimination of poverty, HIV prevention and promotion of SRHR. They should ensure robust funding for programmes that protect human rights, particularly those that empower women to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

7. Priority also needs to be placed on investing in programmes that address the sexual and reproductive health rights of young people, who represent nearly one-third of the population in developing countries.[7] Guaranteeing young people's access to a broad range of sexual and reproductive health information and choices, including contraceptive services and commodities is essential to achieving the goals set out in Cairo.

Looking Forward

8. As the ICPD goal year fast approaches, the Commission's meaningful engagement with members of civil society is critical to advancing the ICPD agenda. We look forward to working with the Commission and its members in preparation for and during the General Assembly's Special Session to assess the status of implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, and beyond to make sure that governments and the international community effectively address obstacles to realizing the ICPD goals.

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[7] UNFPA. 2010. *The Case for Investing in Young People as Part of a National Poverty Reduction Strategy*. New York: UNFPA.